

Commuter plan can benefit employees and environment

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ANGLETON—According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), each household in the Houston area spends \$8,840 a year on transportation costs, the highest in the nation.

Each year, the average commuter in the area spends 211 hours on the road, 50 of which are spent in traffic. The cost of congestion in the Houston area is \$2.66 billion, or \$850 per person, the fourth highest in the country.

In an effort to cut air pollution, reduce traffic congestion and increase employee job satisfaction, the EPA and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) have established a voluntary nation-wide program that would also improve the environment.

“Reducing the amount of time workers

spend in traffic is a tangible way that businesses can help to improve our environment,” said Margo Oge, director of EPA’s Office of Transportation and Air Quality. “it also strengthens families.”

EPA and DOT are working with a variety of national, state, regional and local organizations and agencies to challenge U.S. employers to voluntarily offer their employees commuter benefits.

“If half of all U.S. workers were offered commuter benefits, air pollution and traffic in the United States would be cut by the equivalent of 15 million cars,” a spokesperson for the agency said.

Participating employers have the option of offering at least one of a multitude of benefits to their employees, including:

- tax-free transit passes
- tax-free van pool benefits
- telecommuting
- parking cash out

- shuttles to and from transit locations
- ridesharing or car pool matching
- compressed work schedules
- facilities or financial assistance for biking or walking to work

■ commuting awards for employees
Likewise, the plan also benefits employers by:

- helping employers recruit and retain quality employees
- increasing employee production and job satisfaction
- reducing payroll taxes
- offering a way to make a substantial contribution to the environment and the community

“It’s good for our communities and our quality of life,” Oge said. “A number of cities and companies have signed on as charter partners, including Enron in Houston.”

Area employers interested in the plan may contact the EPA at 800-856-3131.